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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Back to School: 84,000 expected in Georgia's Pre-K this fall

State Budget adds back 10 days to calendar as Georgia's Pre-K celebrates 20th Year

ATLANTA, Ga., (August 5, 2012) – School bells will be ringing soon for some 84,000 Georgia's Pre-K students. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the lottery-funded Pre-K program, recently ranked by The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) as one of the top state programs in the nation, based on quality standards, teacher qualifications and enrollment.

The first day of 2012 Georgia's Pre-K will vary based on school system and child care provider. It starts as early as August 8, 2012, and runs through the week following Labor Day, September 3, 2012. During the 2010-2011 school year, sixty-six percent of all four-year-olds in Georgia were served by state Pre-K and Head Start, with a statewide Pre-K enrollment of nearly 83,000.

"This fall, we are excited that the state budget is adding back 10 days to the Pre-K calendar and increasing the school year from 160 to 170 days," said Bobby Cagle, commissioner for Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, the state agency responsible for administering the program.

"Research shows that the early education of children, from birth to five-years-old, proves critical to their success later in kindergarten and elementary school," Cagle explained. "As a result, we believe investing in our youngest learners is important not only to their personal success, but also to the long-term economic growth and potential of Georgia."

"Starting school is an exciting time for children and families and is also a time when learning and education become more formalized," said Susan Adams, assistant commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K

Program. “Starting school is a big step and we are excited to provide so many children's first quality formal education experience.”

For parents enrolling their children in Georgia’s Pre-K, Adams and DECAL offer the following helpful tips to make the first day go smoother:

- Send your child to school in clothes they can manage independently in the bathroom: No overalls.
- Make sure your child’s shoes are comfortable for playtime: No flip-flops or tennis shoes with Velcro.
- Visit the classroom before school starts so children are familiar with the new surroundings.
- Tell your child’s teacher about any fears he or she may have.
- Discuss any special dietary needs or allergies your child may have with their teacher and have her/ him explain program policies.
- Complete any necessary forms or releases your Pre-K provider may require for dispensing medication during the school day.
- Locate the bathroom with your child and determine any special bathroom routines the school observes.
- Build in extra time for the first day: Make sure you have time to say good-bye.
- Determine if your child needs a blanket for rest time: Can they bring a favorite stuffed animal?
- Send along a family photo in your child’s backpack in case they get lonely.

About Bright from the Start

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia’s children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia’s Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.dec.al.ga.gov.